NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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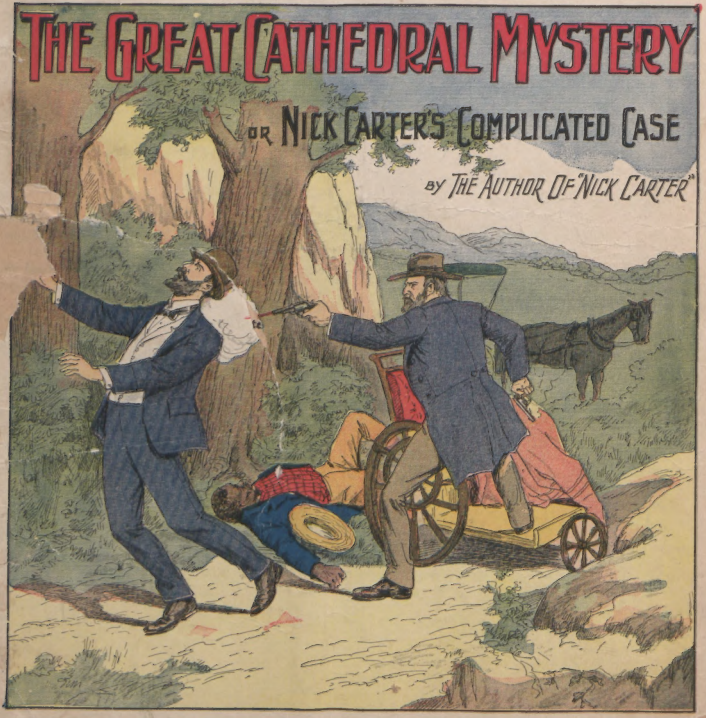
THE GREAT CATHEDRAL MYSTERY

OR NICK CARTER'S COMPLICATED CASE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



The tragedy at Devil's Hole, where the lifeless bodies of Tom Morgan and his negro servant were discovered, was the complicated case Nick Carter had to unravel.

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THE GREAT CATHEDRAL MYSTERY

OR,

Nick Carter's Complicated Case.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A FORETOLD MURDER.

"Hello, Central!"

It was Nick Carter who made this remark over the phone, and instantly the reply came:

"Hello! What number do you——"

The voice of the girl at the opposite end of the wire ended there—and it ended in a gasp which was distinctly heard by the detective.

At the same instant he also heard a noise which might have been caused by the falling of a body from a chair or stool to the floor. This was followed by a sharp click—that rather indescribable sound which one notices when the connection over a telephone is suddenly cut off.

Then silence absolute.

"Humph!" muttered the detective. "That was strange."

He reached out and pressed down the receiver hook two or three times quickly, to attract the attention of the central office again, and this performance he repeated again and again until he was convinced that he would receive no answer.

"There should be more than one operator at central," he mused, after a moment. "I'll try once more."

Again he picked up the receiver, and again he endeavored to attract the attention of the central office, but without success.

After a little he once more returned the receiver to its hook, and turned in his chair just as his chief assistant, Chick, entered the room where he was seated.

"Chick," he said, "you don't happen to know where the central office for this telephone district is located, do you?"

"No," replied the assistant, "I do not."

"That comes of being in a town where one is unacquainted," responded the detective.

"What is wrong?" asked Chick.

"That is what I wish to find out. Look here, Chick, suppose you take a run up to the house of this doctor to whom I was about to telephone."

"All right."

"He lives only about half a mile up this street, and as it is the only street in the village, you will have no difficulty in finding him."

"Not a bit."

"Besides, everybody knows where he lives and all about him."

"Dr. Harris, isn't it?"

"Yes; Mark Harris is his full name."

"What am I to tell him?"

"Merely that I wish to call upon him at his office before he retires to-night, and after he has completed his evening calls. I want him to set the hour so that I can be sure to find him at home, and with a little time at his disposal to give to me. That is all."

"All right. I'll go at once."

"Yes. Then return here. If I don't happen to be here when you return, wait until I come in, for I shall have another try at this telephone, and if I don't get a reply I may run outside to ask some questions about it."

"I understand. But, I say—suppose the doctor asks me what it is that you wish to see him about, what shall I say to him?"

"Say that I will tell him that when I see him."

"You don't wish me to mention anything about the murder, then?"

"Not unless he brings up the subject himself. If he does so, talk with him about it. You are as capable of determining what to say as I am. You need no instructions on that point, do you?"

"I think not."

"Well, get along, then. It is nine o'clock now. I think eleven would be a good hour for the doctor to fix upon to receive me. If that hour is satisfactory to him, it will be so to me."

Chick chuckled.

"Say, Nick," he said, as he stopped for an instant at the door, "is it true that it is only nine o'clock now?"

"Yes; just nine. Why?"

"Because if you should step out upon the one street which this village boasts, you would be willing to swear that it is past midnight. On my soul I believe that the whole town has gone to bed."

"Likely enough. Early to bed and early to rise, you know. But it is the same in all the little villages of this size which are away from railroads, like this one. They go to bed with the chickens. Skip along, now."

As soon as Chick was out of the door, Nick Carter turned again to the telephone.

But his efforts to obtain a reply to his summons met with no response, and, after several fruitless attempts, he replaced the receiver and hurried out upon the street.

As Chick had said, the village seemed deserted.

Across the way where a rickety old building stood, which had been dignified by the name of hotel, one feeble light was visible, and toward this the detective bent his steps.

He was only just in time to obtain the information he desired, for the solitary individual who occupied the room upon which Nick intruded was in the act of putting out the light when the detective entered.

"Want a room?" he demanded, turning about when he perceived the detective; and then recognizing in Nick Carter a gentleman who had taken supper at his hotel that same evening, he added:

"Oh! It is you, is it? Don't that room across the street, of Tom Morgan's, suit you?"

"Perfectly," replied the detective. "The room is all right."

"Then what do you want? I'm closing up. It is time that all honest folks were in bed."

"And yet," replied Nick, smiling, "I perceive that you are still up. I want to ask you a few questions, Mr. Mason."

"Fire away, then."

"Where is the telephone exchange in this village?"

"The what?"

"The telephone exchange."

"Why, there's a telephone most anywhere now-a-days. There's one in this house, there's one in Tom Morgan's room where you are staying, and——"

"Yes; but what I want is the exchange. When you make use of the telephone, who answers you when you say 'Hello'?"

"Why, the girl at the central office."

"Exactly. Where is the central office?"

"Oh! That's over at Cresville, three miles from here."

"Then there is no central office in this village?"

"Nope."

"Have you ever been in the central office at Cresville?"

"Once! When they first opened it."

"How many operators do they employ there?"

"I dunno. Two, I guess, in the busy part of the day, and only one at night. There ain't much doin' around here at night, you know."

"So I perceive."

Nick hesitated a moment, and then stepped to the telephone in the hotel office and took the receiver from the hook.

After waiting several seconds and receiving no reply, he turned again to the proprietor and remarked:

"There is nobody there, you see."

"Well, I suppose the girl has gone out, or has got a beau, or something. There ain't much doin' here, nights, as I said before. Mebby she's asleep."

The detective perceived that he could obtain no definite information from the man, and so he said "Good night"

and went out again, returning at once to the room where he had taken up his abode for the time he should remain in Spotstown, which was the name of the little village, which, although it was within an hour's ride of the city of New York, was yet as far removed from it in other respects as if it were located on a desert island in midocean.

"That was a queer thing about that telephone," he mused, as he crossed the street, "and yet I don't know why I should bother myself about it. At all events I haven't time to investigate it at present. Again, it is more than likely that I was mistaken."

He climbed the stairway between two stores, entered the room, seated himself and lighted a cigar.

"All the same," he mused, continuing his train of thought, "I think that after I have had a talk with Dr. Harris I'll ride over to Cresville and investigate, if I cannot get a reply over the telephone in the meantime, for it sounded to me very much as if somebody attacked that young woman operator at the very moment she was replying to my call."

He smoked on in silence for some time, and presently his assistant entered the room.

"Well, Chick?" asked the detective.

"The doctor is there, at his office, waiting for you now," was the reply. "He says that he will not go out again to-night unless he gets a call he doesn't expect. You can go to him as soon as you care to."

"Then I will go at once."

"Do you wish me to go with you?"

"Yes, you might as well do so."

The two detectives left the room together and walked rapidly up the street toward the residence of the physician, where they were at once admitted.

The doctor met them at the door, and conducted them at once to his office.

"You are Nick Carter, aren't you?" asked the doctor, as soon as he had seated himself in his office chair at the desk, and had motioned his guests to other chairs in the room.

"Yes," replied the detective, with a slight rise of his eyebrows; and then he added:

"You seem to be well informed, doctor."

"Oh, I have to be. That is part of my profession. The fact is, I was expecting you, and I purposely remained at home this evening so as to be here when you arrived. I am told that you have made yourself at home in Tom Morgan's rooms."

"Yes."

Again the eyebrows of the detective went up a little, for while he did not object to the possession of so much information on the part of the physician, there was something about the manner of the man in announcing what he knew which grated upon the nerves of the detective.

"You seem to be particularly well informed," he said, smilingly.

"Oh, that is nothing," was the reply. "Everybody is well informed about the affairs of others in a village like Spotstown. I only guessed that you were Nick Carter, by putting two and two together, you know; but the entire population of the place is aware that you have made yourself at home in the rooms of Tom Morgan—and also why you did so."

Nick Carter was really surprised this time.

"Why I did so?" he repeated after the doctor.

"Yes."

"May I ask for the answer which the town makes to that statement?" asked Nick.

The doctor smiled and showed his white teeth under his intensely black mustache.

"The postmaster of a small village is always responsible for a great deal of the gossip which takes place within its precincts," he replied.

"I think I understand you," said Nick.

"Well," continued the doctor, "after the disappearance of Tom Morgan, and while the excitement which followed it was rampant, the postmaster remembered that Tom had corresponded with a mysterious personage in New York whose name he could not recall, save that it was Nick something or other. Later, when Tom's body was found——"

"Do you believe that it is his body that was found?" asked the detective, suddenly interrupting the physician.

"Certainly I do; but I will touch upon that later. As I was saying, when the body was found, the postmaster remembered a lot more."

"Oh, he did, eh?"

"Yes; and I happened to be the first one he told about it."

"I see."

"I advised him to keep the matter to himself, but it was too great a task for him. He told others, merely withholding the name—your name; see?"

"And what was it that he told?"

"This: That for a considerable time before his death, Tom Morgan had been in communication with a detective in New York, to whom he had confided the fact that he was in daily dread of being murdered; that he had forwarded a key to his rooms to that detective and had requested him, in case of his—Tom's—disappearance, to come to Spotstown and take possession of the rooms. The postmaster even hinted that the detective would find in the rooms clews which would lead to the arrest of the parties concerned in his disappearance or death, as the case might be."

"Then it is to be presumed that your postmaster has the faculty of reading other people's letters when they are in transit through his hands, eh?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"He says," he remarked with a smile, "that Tom Morgan told him these things."

"Which, of course, you do not believe."

"Certainly not."

"And Morgan not being here to deny the statement——"

"The word of the postmaster has to stand."

"Well," said the detective, "I am not at all sorry that you—and others in the village—are so well posted. We can get at the object of our meeting much more expeditiously."

"You are here to discover the murderer of Tom Morgan," said the doctor.

"Precisely."

"And you wish me to assist you, eh?"

"I desire every person who can do so to assist me," was the studied reply.

The doctor drummed for a moment with his fingers on the desk in front of him, and then slowly and deliberately he replied:

"I will give you every assistance in my power, Mr. Carter, but the affair is involved in such a maze of mystery that I doubt if Morgan's murderer will ever be found—even by the great and only Nick Carter." And he ended the remark with an unpleasant laugh.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY OF DEVIL'S HOLE.

The detective still regarded the doctor smilingly.

"That, of course, is a matter of opinion and not necessarily expert opinion, either," he remarked. "I don't think we need discuss it now."

"No; certainly not."

"You just now referred to the disappearance of Thomas Morgan, doctor. Will you tell me when he was missed for the first time?"

"Just a week ago to-day," replied the physician.

"And who was the first to notice his absence?"

"I think I was the first, myself."

"Will you tell me how that happened?"

"Certainly. Morgan and I had long been in the habit of playing chess together at uncertain and unstated intervals. Sometimes we played together twice in a week, and often it happened that we did not have a game for two or three weeks at a time."

"Well?"

"One week ago to-night I was dull. There were no calls on my book for me to make, and as the night was a stormy one I did not look for patients to come to my office, so I strolled down to see Morgan and have a game of chess. He wasn't there."

"Well?" said the detective, again.

"Well—isn't that enough?"

"Hardly."

"What more do you want?"

"Did you look for him?"

"Where in the world would I look for him, if not in his rooms?"

"He might have stepped outside," said the detective.

The doctor burst into a loud laugh, and when it had partly subsided he asked, suddenly:

"Mr. Carter, did you ever see Tom Morgan?"

"No."

"Did you never hear anything about him"

"No."

"Not even since you have been in the town to-day?"

"No; not even since I have been in the town to-day, for I have discovered that the moment the name of Thomas Morgan was mentioned, everybody had business somewhere else, and nobody had a word to say about him."

"Exactly."

"Why exactly? That is what I have come to you to find out, doctor."

"I don't think that you ought to object to my asking you a few questions first, Mr. Carter, inasmuch as I have promised to give you all the assistance in my power," said the doctor.

"I haven't the least objection. Go ahead."

"You are a detective by profession, aren't you, Carter?" asked the doctor.

"Certainly."

"Who is this gentleman with you?"

"My assistant, Mr. Chickering Carter."

"A brother, perhaps?"

"Something nearer, in one sense; but let it go at that."

"Will you tell me how you were brought into this case, and what it was that induced you to come here?"

"You have already answered that question yourself, but I will repeat the answer for you by saying that it was through certain letters that I received."

"Exactly. The letters to which the postmaster referred."

"Possibly."

"And that is your sole connection with the case?"

"At the present moment, yes."

"Then you know nothing of the antecedents or the history of Tom Morgan?"

"Only such as I have gleaned from the letters I have mentioned."

"Exactly. You are not aware, then, that Morgan never left his rooms only when the nigger who attended him carried him downstairs and put him in the chair he used to wheel about the street when he was well enough to do so and the weather was propitious for it?"

"No; I was not aware of that—until to-day."

"So you have discovered that much since your arrival, have you?"

"Yes; that—and a little more."

"What more?"

"I think, doctor, that it is my turn to ask a few questions," said the detective, still smiling, although Chick,

seated in one corner of the room, out of the glare of the lamplight, was frowning ominously.

But Nick Carter rarely did things without a well-defined motive for his acts, and just now he regarded it as decidedly his play to appear to permit the doctor to dominate the situation entirely.

The detective was aware of the fact that there is a certain class of individuals, of which the doctor was a fair representative, who regard detectives as men apart from the ordinary affairs of life; as beings who may be treated austerely; as spies who go about interfering in the business of other people, and as an inferior quality of mankind from whom it is well to hold aloof.

When Nick Carter first entered the room he was not favorably impressed with the doctor, and he had decided then and there that he had to do with a man who was more than ordinarily intelligent, and who would only betray himself—in case there was anything to betray—through his egotism; and so it was that the detective permitted the physician to take the initiative.

"All right," said the doctor, in reply to Nick's statement, and settling back comfortably in his chair. "Possibly I have been usurping somewhat of your prerogatives: only, before I answer your questions, I think I should, on general principles, insist that you convince me of your right to assume authority in this investigation."

"Quite right, doctor," said Nick. "I was waiting for that question. Are you perhaps aware that Thomas Morgan left a will?"

"No," said the doctor, permitting himself to look surprised.

Nick smiled broadly.

"Then I must assume that there was at least one item of information of which your postmaster was ignorant—or which he neglected to impart to you, since it is a fact that one of the letters received by me contained that information."

"About the will?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me about it?"

"There is nothing to tell, save that in that letter I was referred to a certain firm of lawyers—Clark & Coyne by name—whom he had delegated to take charge of his affairs in case of—er—accident to him. I am employed by Clark & Coyne."

"I see. That's all right. Now what about the will?"

"The will? Nothing at all about it, as far as I know."

"Don't you know anything about the terms of the will?"

"I know that it is a very short document, and that it leaves all the property which Morgan might die owning, to one person, but who the beneficiary is, I——"

"You do not know, eh?" interrupted the doctor, taking that assertion for granted without permitting the detective to complete the sentence. And then, without a pause, he added:

"Does the will specify what property Morgan left? Or, rather, does it state what properties he owned?"

"I think not."

"As a matter of fact he had little or nothing to leave—eh?"

"On that point I am not thoroughly informed, Dr. Harris."

The doctor moved a little in his chair, and altered his position so that his face was still more within the shadow of the green shade which covered the lamp; but nevertheless the detective was aware that there was a fleeting expression of satisfaction in his eyes as he did so; and then the physician asked another question.

"I have forgotten to ask you, Carter," he said, with a subdued and quiet manner which was altogether too studied to be real, and which, particularly in the use he made of the detective's name, amounted almost to insolence, "if my name was mentioned in any of the letters you received—or—in the will. Was it?"

"I cannot answer you as to the will," replied the detective, "but in the letters, your name occurred frequently; but merely to refer to you as Morgan's physician."

"Ah! And that is why you have come to me now?"

"Precisely, sir."

"Then why did you not come to me at once instead of hanging about the town all the afternoon?"

"Oh, well," replied Nick, rendering his voice apologetic only with an effort, for his impulse was to resent the tone used by the doctor, "you know that we detectives have many and devious ways of accomplishing results; eh?"

"Yes," said the doctor, with a perceptible sneer, "I can quite understand that."

Chick stirred uneasily in his chair, and Nick chuckled inwardly, for he knew that his assistant would cheerfully have thrown the doctor through the window for that remark, and the sneer that accompanied it.

"You wished to ask me some questions, did you not, Carter?" continued the doctor, after a short pause.

"Yes, a few."

"Well, fire away. I'm ready."

"How long a time were you acquainted with Thomas Morgan?"

"Since he first came to this town—about a year ago."

"Did you never know him before that time?"

"No; not directly. I knew of him."

"You were his physician while he lived here?"

"Yes."

"You have said that he was a cripple; now what——"

"Pardon me, but I made no such statement. What I did say was that he never left his own rooms only when he was carried down the stairs by a nigger who attended upon him—and so forth."

"Exactly; but one is supposed to presume that a man who resorts to such expedients is a cripple; eh?"

"One may assume what one pleases to assume, Mr. Carter."

"Am I to understand from your remarks that Morgan was not a cripple at all?"

"I think, sir, that Morgan was as capable of using his legs and feet as you are."

"Indeed! Then why——"

"Wait! You are about to ask why he pretended to be a cripple if he was not one, eh?"

"Something like that, yes."

"There you have got me. Indeed, I am not at all sure that he did pretend. The thing may have been real."

"But your statements are paradoxical, doctor."

"In one sense they are, but in another they are not," replied the doctor, sweetly. "Have you never known of a case, Mr. Carter, where a patient—a man or a woman, but oftener a woman than a man—has imagined himself or herself, as the case may be, afflicted with a disability to perform certain functions of the body?"

"Oh, yes. I have heard of such cases. It is a form of dementia, isn't it?"

"Certainly."

"Do you place Thomas Morgan in that class?"

"I have not said that I do; nor am I willing to assert that I do not; but one of two things concerning him is certain."

"May I ask what they are?"

He either had that form of dementia—or he was the cleverest as well as the greatest fraud who ever came down the pike. If there was anything the matter with his legs, I could not discover it, and I regard myself as a competent physician."

"I think there can be no doubt on that point, doctor."

"Tom Morgan's legs were as good as mine—or yours. The circulation in them was just as strong, and regular, and wholesome. He had no constitutional disease that I was ever able to discover. In fact, there was nothing at all the matter with him; and yet——"

"And yet——" repeated Nick, after him.

"And yet I have never seen him attempt to bear his weight upon his feet without falling to the floor and passing into a faint after it."

"You have forced him to make the effort to walk, then?"

"Frequently."

"And always with the same result?"

"Inevitably."

"So you account for it in one of the two ways you have mentioned?"

"Yes."

"You say that he came here a year ago?"

"Approximately—yes."

"Was he known here before that time?"

"No; at least, not that I have ever discovered."

"Do you know what induced him to come here?"

"I haven't even an idea on that point save what he has told me himself, and that explains nothing. His statement was that he happened here. He liked it. He liked the village with its one street. He thought it picturesque, and said that it reminded him of his boyhood home somewhere in Vermont. He liked the view of the river he obtained from the windows of his rooms. You noticed that, I suppose, this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"He used to sit in the big chair behind the curtains of one of those windows, and read from morning till night, every day of his life, save on the very infrequent occasions when his nigger carried him downstairs to the street. He might have obtained better quarters than those over the two stores, but they seemed to suit him to a tee.

"You have seen how he furnished them; one would think that a prince of the blood made his home there. Why, the tapestries and paintings in that room where he passed so much time are worth a small fortune, Carter."

"And yet, just now you said that he had little or nothing to leave."

"Oh, I meant, of course, outside of the effects in his rooms and the cash he had in bank. That was almost used up, you know, at the time he disappeared."

"I didn't know," said Nick. "How much was in the bank in the first place, and how much is there in there now?"

"He opened his account with ten thousand dollars in cash; there is less than a thousand there now. That is a great deal for a man to spend in a village like this inside of a year or a little over; eh?"

"Yes."

"He bought all the new books; all the magazines, all the pictorial papers, and—why, the druggist downstairs, who is also the newsdealer, had a standing order to supply him with everything that came out. That was his hobby—reading."

"Apparently. Now, let us return for a moment to his disappearance—and the murder."

"Yes."

"You say that you went to his rooms a week ago tonight to play chess with him and discovered that he had disappeared?"

"Yes."

"Did you enter the rooms at that time?"

"Not at once; but I did inside half an hour after that."

"Tell me about it."

"There is nothing to tell about that particular experience, save that when I discovered that my summons at the door remained unanswered, I regarded it as strange, for the reason that during the year Morgan has been in the village he has never been known to be absent from his rooms after dark, or even after the sun had gone down."

"It was after dark at that time, then?"

"Yes; just after dark; half an hour, perhaps."

"Well?"

"I rapped repeatedly and, receiving no answer, I descended the stairs again, and entered the drug store, where I asked if he had been seen. The druggist told me that the nigger had taken him out in his chair about two that afternoon. He had not seen either of them since, but supposed of course that they had returned."

"And then——?"

"The village constable happened to enter the store and I asked him and the druggist to go up to Morgan's rooms with me. We pounded on the door for some time until the whole push got a hunch that something was wrong. I was for breaking down the door, but the druggist, who owns the building, happened to remember that somewhere he had another key which fitted the lock on the door. He made a search for it and found it; then we went inside the rooms—but only to find them just as you found them to-day, for we neither disturbed nor moved a thing there. It was enough when we discovered that Morgan and his nigger were both absent."

"And then——?"

"Then? Nothing. I hung around the place until midnight and then hired a man to stand there till morning. The constable organized a searching party, and the town, the roads, the woods and fields about here, and every house within miles, were all searched."

"Always without result, eh?"

"There wasn't a trace of Morgan or of the nigger to be found anywhere until this very morning; and you know what was found then, and where it was found."

"Yes."

"On a ledge of rock overlooking Devil's Hole, Tom Morgan was seated in his wheel chair, and the nigger was seated a few feet away with his arms clasped about his knees and his back against a tree. Each of them had a bullet hole in the middle of his forehead, and neither of them had been dead more than one day. Now, there you are. If you can explain the mystery you're a dandy! That's all I've got to say."

CHAPTER III.

A COMPLICATED CASE.

If the reader is perhaps somewhat mystified by the somewhat obscure beginning of this story, it is only necessary to inform him that for obvious reasons the editor of Nick Carter's notes has deemed it wise to carry the events chronologically—or as they came to the detective in person.

Now, however, it becomes necessary to go back a little upon the pathway of events, and to take the reader somewhat deeper into confidence with the affair upon which he was now engaged—or rather to explain how it was that the detective, accompanied by his chief assistant, happened to be in Spotstown at all.

Those who are familiar with the life and experiences of the great detective are aware that he was almost daily in receipt of letters from all over the world, and that about ninety per cent. of these letters were thrown into the wastebasket upon receipt and no further attention paid to them.

These letters which arrive in his daily mail possess various qualities.

Many of them are threatening letters; these are the kind which come from enemies of the detective, rendered so through the exigencies of his profession, and as a rule they contain threats against his life. To these he inevitably paid no attention whatever.

Another class are begging letters; and about these no comment is necessary.

A third class emanate from would-be detectives who think they could give the detective valuable assistance, and who offer to do so.

A fourth class is devoted to the suggestion of reforms which the detective is supposed to be in a position to inaugurate.

A fifth assortment of them suggest to the detective the trailing down of a band of criminals which exist only in the imagination of the writer, and still a sixth class are written by people who fancy themselves in some impending danger, and who seek the detective's aid in the event of the happening of emergencies.

Now, the letters which have already been referred to in the preceding chapter as having been written by one Thomas Morgan to the detective, were five in number, and the receipt of them, from the first to the fifth, covered a space of two months.

They had belonged in the sixth class which has just been specified, and the detective gave them little or no attention until other matters arose in connection with them which made them seem important.

These letters had all been in about the same tenor, and had informed the detective that the writer was a man over whose head the sword of Damocles was hanging, ready to fall at any moment.

They told him that Thomas Morgan—the writer—had for years been pursued by an avenger who sought his life, and who would some day succeed in murdering him.

They explained that the feud was one of long standing, and that at any moment the writer of the letters might mysteriously disappear, or on the other hand might be found dead, murdered, somewhere in the vicinity of the place where he lived—Spotstown.

They described accurately where the writer lived and how he lived; they explained that he was a cripple; they told of the almost fabulous amounts of personal property which the writer possessed, concealed in various places—some of it in safe deposit vaults under aliases, some of it

concealed in mysterious caches that were skillfully hidden, some of it in the rooms he occupied in the village of Spotstown, etc., all of which would be revealed to the detective, in case of accident or death visiting the writer, provided he would search diligently for the key to the hiding places which would be found in the room at Spotstown.

The last of these letters was received by the detective through a messenger, instead of the regular mail.

It was, in substance, quite like the others, but it closed with the following paragraph:

"I have hitherto refrained from telling you anything of my life's history, and I will not burden you with it now, save to tell you that I have not always been a good man. I am, in fact, an ex-criminal. Great crimes have been charged against me, but whether I am guilty or not guilty of them, it is unnecessary for me to state. The disposition of my property is in the hands of Clark & Coyne, attorneys, to whom you may apply if you ever take this matter in hand."

The letter was signed "Thomas Morgan," and it inclosed a key to the rooms where we first discovered the detective, seated at the telephone.

The first of these letters had made no impression upon the detective; he placed them in the same category to which he relegated all the others of its class.

When the second one came to him, his experienced eye discovered that it had been opened and read while in transit, and that feature interested him so he placed the two letters together, and waited.

The third had also been read after it had left the hands of the writer—and the fourth.

The fifth, as had been said, came by messenger, and was left at his door during his absence.

Upon receipt of it, he read them all over again, interested in spite of himself, and then called his chief assistant to the room to discuss the matter with him.

That interview with Chick concerning the letter will explain why the detective decided on the spot to interest himself in the affair, and it is therefore given here.

"Chick," he said, "I wish you would read those five letters carefully, in their order, and then tell me what sort of impression they make upon you; but don't tell me anything at all until you have read the last one."

While the assistant was engaged in reading the letters, the detective watched him silently, and when Chick at last put them aside, he said:

"Well? What do you think of them?"

"I wonder," replied Chick, musingly, "if they can have anything to do with that international matter which Wilkie came to see you about, more than a year ago?"

The detective's reply was a strange one, for he said:

"Chick, I sometimes wonder if you and I should not work separately, for it is a fact that our thoughts seem to run in the same grooves."

"Do you mean," said Chick, "that the same idea had occurred to you?"

"Certainly."

"What suggested it to you?"

"First," replied Nick, "the statement which Morgan makes, that he is an ex-criminal but that there is some doubt even in his own mind of his guilt. Then I went back over the letters and found the suggestion re-enforced by the reference he makes to the fortunes he has hidden away in various places."

"That," said Chick, "was the first thing that impressed me."

"Likely enough; but you must remember that you expected to be impressed by something when I gave you the letters to read. You knew that I would not ask you to read them unless I had an object in view."

"Yes; that is true."

"That reference to an almost fabulous fortune I at first attributed to the vagaries of an unsound mind."

"Of course."

"But now, as one reads the letters consecutively, and takes particular note of the closing paragraph of the last one, there seems to be a decided method in the madness."

"Without doubt."

"Now, let us go back for a moment to that case to which you just referred. Suppose you get your notes about it."

The assistant brought his book of notes at once and reseated himself in front of his chief.

"Now," said Nick, "when was it that Chief Wilkie came to see me?"

"Thirteen months ago—a year ago the tenth of last month," replied Chick, referring to his notes.

"Look over the notes for a moment, and then give me the substance of what was said at that time. So much has happened since that I am not willing to trust my memory entirely."

There were a few moments of silence, and then Chick closed the book and said:

"I have entered it here under the title of 'The Cathedral Mystery.'"

"Yes; I remember suggesting that name for it. Go on."

"The case had been referred to Chief Wilkie, of the U. S. Secret Service, by the authorities of Madrid, in Spain, but as it did not correctly come under his jurisdiction, he referred the matter to you."

"I recall all that part of it. Go ahead with the case itself."

"The substance of these notes is this: The priest who acted in the capacity of treasurer for the Cathedral of San Juan de Uloa, was murdered by a man who disposed of the body secretly, made himself up to represent the priest, and succeeded in deceiving every person associated with the cathedral for a period of almost two months."

"Yes."

"The murderer, or substitute, or impostor, whatever you care to call him, was not unmasked until he had succeeded in stealing the entire treasure of the church, together with some hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of jewels belonging to private individuals, and also a much larger amount in value belonging to the crown of Spain, all of which had been deposited with the treasurer of the cathedral for safe-keeping."

"Yes. Go on."

"The thief and murderer made good his escape with the fortune he had stolen, but it was not until a month after his disappearance that the full truth of the matter was known."

"Yes."

"Then the body of the murdered priest was discovered, as well as the other details of the crime committed by the remarkable criminal."

"I remember now. Continue."

"There was not the slightest trace of the criminal. He had left no trail behind him. There was no description of him anywhere. There was not even a name or an alias by which he could be designated."

"Yes."

"He had succeeded in living, for two months, in the shoes of the murdered priest. Nobody knew whence he came, nor where he went when he disappeared, but it was guessed that he might have come to this country."

"Yes."

"If the body of the dead priest had not been discovered, it would have been thought that he had committed the crimes himself, as well had the thief and murderer laid his plans and executed them. Nobody knew that he had been there in the cathedral at all until a month after his departure. The identification of the priest was, however, complete, so that there remained no doubt but that the crimes had been the work of a clever criminal."

Chick put his notebook aside and added:

"That is the case as it was brought to us more than a year ago. I was present when you talked with Chief Wilkie about it, and I remember that you told him that the only way to work up the case was to begin where the crimes were committed—that is, in Madrid. You said at the time that if the authorities of Madrid who were interested in the affair cared to send for you, you would go over there and take the case, but that you regarded it as almost useless to begin it here. Wilkie replied that he would report what you had said, to the parties at Madrid—and that is the last we ever heard about it."

"Exactly. Is there a description of the missing jewels and property among your notes?"

"Yes; a complete one."

"And what is the aggregate value?"

"Approximately, it is three millions."

"Dollars or pesetas?"

"Dollars."

"It is larger than I thought."

"It is big enough for a criminal to take great chances of securing."

The detective was silent for a moment, and then he said:

"I will wire to Wilkie to-night. In the morning I will call upon those lawyers—Clark & Coyne—and sometime to-morrow you and I will go to Spotstown and have a talk with this man Thomas Morgan. There may be nothing in it, but it is worth investigation."

CHAPTER IV.

ONE MYSTERY FOLLOWS ANOTHER.

It was half-past nine when the detective entered the law offices of Clark & Coyne the following morning.

Nick Carter was more interested in this matter which had come to him in such a strange way, than he had admitted, even to his assistant.

He was especially fond of the excitement connected with the working out of a complicated case, and he was also a thorough believer in the theory of a logical sequence of events.

The sequence of events, as he read them in this particular case, was this:

First, an unknown man had penetrated—or ingratiated himself—into the secrets of the lives of the clergy of a great cathedral in Madrid. He had lived there for months, undetected. He had murdered one of the priests—who acted as treasurer for the institution—and had personated the murdered man so perfectly that he had deceived everybody. Then he had disappeared, and so cleverly had he arranged his plans, that a month was allowed to elapse before suspicions had turned against him. By that time he had disappeared utterly, and not a trace of him could be found; and with him had vanished an immense fortune.

Second, a man who signed his name as Thomas Morgan, had appeared in an obscure village, not far from New York City, to be sure—but then there are many obscure villages close to the metropolis—who had lived in retirement, and who wrote half-crazed letters to the detective in which he stated that he was possessed of an immense fortune which he had taken great pains to conceal. He had divided it and placed it in various safe deposit vaults under various aliases, and some of it he had buried in hidden places.

Third, he believed himself to be a marked man—one who might be murdered or who might be made to disappear mysteriously at any moment. Now, this third point was only significant because of the fact that statistics show that every criminal who steals from religious institutions ultimately becomes possessed of this idea.

Fourth, the man, in his letters, acknowledged himself to be a great criminal.

There was the sequence of events.

They were not much, to be sure.

To a mind less adaptable than Nick Carter's, they would not have appealed at all, but the detective was convinced that the history of Thomas Morgan should be investigated, whether there was any connection between him and the cathedral robbery or not.

To the head of the firm of lawyers, he announced himself as follows:

"I am informed, Mr. Clark, that you are the legal representative of one Thomas Morgan, of Spotstown. He has written several letters to me, and because of those letters I have applied to you for some information about him. I am Nick Carter."

The lawyer did not immediately reply.

Nick noticed that he gave a perceptible start when the name of Thomas Morgan was mentioned, and that then he settled back in his chair to hear the detective to the end before he made any response to his remarks, so the detective added:

"I have received five letters in all from Mr. Morgan; four through the mail and the fifth by the hands of a messenger. The last one came yesterday."

"Yesterday!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"Yes."

"What time yesterday?"

"During the afternoon."

"The time of its receipt may be of importance, Mr. Carter."

"Oh, well, it came to my house between three and five o'clock. I can readily ascertain the exact time if it should be of importance."

"You have not heard anything about Mr. Morgan this morning, then?"

"No."

"Are you positive that the letter which you received yesterday was from him?"

"Quite positive. It is in the same tenor as the others, and the handwriting is the very same. There can be no doubt of that. Why do you ask?"

"Thomas Morgan disappeared, very mysteriously, a week ago to-day. He has not been seen by those who knew him, since that time; but less than half an hour ago, I received information that he had been found—murdered!"

Even Nick Carter was startled by this sudden announcement.

"Murdered!" he repeated, after the lawyer.

"Yes."

"When and where and how?"

"When? Sometime yesterday; probably early in the day. Where? Half a mile from the village of Spotstown, at a place called Devil's Hole. How? He was shot through the head, first. After that, the fiends who killed him, mutilated his features with a knife, evidently in some rude attempt to make a sign of a cross upon his face."

"Eh?" said the detective. "A sign of a cross? How was it done?"

"With a knife. A strip of flesh was cut away from the top of his forehead down the length of his nose to the end of his chin; another was cut in the same manner from the lobe of one ear to the other, across his cheeks and face."

"When was the body discovered?" asked Nick.

"Two or three hours ago."

"How did you hear about it?"

"The information was telephoned into this office for me."

"From Spotstown?"

"No; from Cresville, three miles away."

"By whom?"

"By a woman or a girl. I don't know her name. She cut off the connection before my clerk was able to ascertain that much."

"Are you sure that the information is authentic?"

"Yes. I telephoned to Spotstown later, and it was verified by the authorities there."

"You say that he disappeared a week ago and was found murdered only this morning?"

"Yes."

"Were you aware of the disappearance before you heard of the murder?"

"No; I knew nothing about it until I placed myself in communication with the authorities of Spotstown after I had received the news of his death from Cresville."

"The message from Cresville did not come directly to you? That is, you did not reply to the telephone in person, did you?"

"No; it came before I arrived at the office. One of my clerks received it."

"It might be interesting to know the exact wording of that message," said the detective, musingly.

"Wait a moment and I will summon the clerk who received it," was the reply.

This was done, and to the detective's questions the clerk responded that very soon after his arrival at the office, at eight-thirty, the telephone bell rang. On replying to it, he was asked if that was the office of Clark & Coyne. Upon replying that it was, the voice—a woman's voice—asked for one of the members of the firm in person.

Being informed that neither of the gentlemen had arrived, he was asked to take a message and to deliver it to the first member of the firm to arrive.

The message was this:

"Thomas Morgan, of Spotstown, who disappeared a week ago, was found, with his negro body servant, early this morning, at a place between here and Spotstown, called Devil's Hole. Both had been dead about twenty-four hours, and both were shot through the brain."

"Was that all the information you received from the woman?" asked the detective of the clerk.

"Yes, sir. I asked where she was, and she replied that she was at Cresville, and added that if I desired further information, the authorities at Spotstown would supply it. I then asked her name, and she cut off the connection without replying."

"Thank you," said Nick. "That will do for the present."

Then he turned again to Mr. Clark.

"You arrived at the office soon after that, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes; about a quarter to nine."

"And upon being told of the report, you at once called up Spotstown?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, as nearly as you can, exactly what you were told from there."

"In effect, the same that I had already been told, with a few of the particulars added."

"What were those particulars?"

"The bodies of Morgan and his negro servant were discovered by a Dr. Harris, of Spotstown, who saw them as he was driving rapidly past Devil's Hole in response to a professional call. Morgan, who was a cripple, as you are doubtless aware, was seated in his wheel chair, near the brink of the chasm. He had been shot and mutilated, as I have already described. The negro was seated at some distance, with his back against a tree. He had been shot in the same manner, but not mutilated."

"And until the bodies were found, is it a fact that neither of them had been seen for a week or more?"

"Just a week, to a day."

"Is there any theory as to what had become of them during that time?"

"None whatever, that I was able to learn."

"Is this Devil's Hole in a remote locality?"

"It is on a lonely road between Spotstown and Cresville; not the main road, but an old road that is seldom used now."

"Was the identification of Morgan complete?"

"Yes; I asked that question when I learned about the mutilation."

"What was the reply?"

"That the doctor who found the bodies—Dr. Harris—had attended Morgan ever since he came to the town, and that it was he who made the identification, although there had not been any doubt on the point at all."

"Do you know anything about this doctor?"

"No."

While the detective was hesitating about the form of his next question, the lawyer asked one.

"May I ask," he said, "how it is that you happened to call upon me this morning about the affairs of Thomas Morgan, if you knew nothing about his disappearance, or death?"

"I told you that I had received several letters from him, and that the last one was delivered to me by a messenger as late as yesterday in the afternoon."

"Yes; and at that time Morgan must have been already dead."

"True enough; but all the same he could have forwarded the letter shortly before his death, so that it was delivered after it."

"Just so; only it it just a little strange, don't you think so?"

"To tell you the truth, sir, I regard it as mighty strange, indeed!" replied Nick.

"Was it the receipt of those several letters only which sent you to me, Mr. Carter?"

"Why, yes; we will look upon it in that light for the present. Here they are, all of them. I would like to have you look them over and tell me what you think of them."

The detective gave the letters into the hands of the lawyer and watched him narrowly while he read them, beginning with the first and continuing on to the end, without comment. Then he as silently returned them.

"Well?" said Nick.

"It is a very strange affair altogether," replied the lawyer.

"What do you know about this man Morgan?"

"No more than you do, sir. Our acquaintance, like yours, was by correspondence only."

"You never saw him?"

"Never to my knowledge."

"Nor your partner?"

"My partner has not visited this office for more than a year. He is an invalid and is now abroad. He is, however, expected home shortly, when he hopes to resume business."

"What does Morgan mean in these letters by his reference to your firm as concerns the disposition of his property in case of his death?"

"Let me give you the history of our connection with the affair, in its order, and you will see it has all come about."

"Certainly; that is exactly what I want."

"Something less than a year ago I received Thomas Morgan's first letter. It was addressed to the firm name, Clark & Coyne. Mr. Coyne had been absent six months or more at the time, and, of course, I attended to all matters of business."

"Of course."

"The letter contained a thousand-dollar bill as a retainer, and stated simply that the writer wished to

retain the firm as his counsel; that he did not wish us to call upon him in person at Spotstown, but that he would communicate with us from time to time by letter; or that, if possible, he would call at our office at a later date. That was all there was in the first letter."

"And then——"

"I deposited the money to our account, and entered his name on our books as a regular client."

"Well?"

"Some weeks later I received a second letter; and this letter was a great surprise to me."

"Why so?"

"It directed me to draw a will, and to forward it to the writer for signature and attestation."

"Was that so surprising?"

"Not the fact itself; but the substance of it."

"What was that?"

"The letter directed that the will be drawn so that every dollar of which the testator should die possessed, should be left to my partner, Phillip Coyne, in trust, to carry out certain provisions to be contained in a letter which would be filed with us when the will was returned signed and attested. That letter was to be made a part of the will, but it was to be opened only by Phillip Coyne in person."

Nick Carter remained in a brown study for a moment. Then he asked:

"Did you draw the will?"

"Yes; and sent it to him, as he requested."

"It was returned?"

"Yes; properly signed and attested."

"And the letter?"

"It came with the will. Both are in that safe yonder, sealed in a large envelope, awaiting the return of my partner from abroad."

"Suppose your partner should not return? Suppose he should die—what would you feel called upon to do in such a case as that?"

"I should open and read both the will and the letter and abide by the directions as nearly as the law would permit."

"Isn't the whole thing rather an unusual proceeding?"

"Unusual! It is unheard of. I have communicated with my partner, and he informs me that he never heard of this Thomas Morgan in his life. The whole thing is a mystery to me—and now, in the face of what has happened, I am at my wits' end."

CHAPTER V.

A GREATLY COMPLICATED CASE.

"What else has occurred in the line of your correspondence with the strange client, which you regard of importance at the present time, and under the existing circumstances?" asked the detective, after a short pause.

"There is only one thing more," replied the lawyer. "Thomas Morgan's letters—and I have not received above a dozen of them, all told—are unimportant with the exception of two of them."

The lawyer left his chair and crossed the room to his letter file, presently returning with two letters in his hand.

"Here they are," he said, handing them to Nick. "You will see that they are exactly alike, although written at different dates. I might say to you before you read them, that they came by express and not through the mails, and were inclosed in wooden boxes, which were tightly sealed. Read them."

Nick did as requested, and, as they were exactly alike, the reproduction of one of them will suffice here.

Dated at Spotstown, six weeks earlier, and only four days apart, the letters were as follows:

"CLARK & COYNE, Counselors at Law.

"GENTLEMEN: I forward you herewith fifty thousand dollars in cash which I desire to be placed in the hands of my trustee under my will—Mr. Philip Coyne—and to be held by him for me, subject to my order. Very truly yours, THOMAS MORGAN."

"This means," said Nick, "that Morgan has sent you one hundred thousand dollars in cash: that is, that he forwarded fifty thousand dollars with each letter, or package?"

"Exactly."

"Did you accept it?"

"What else could I do? Besides, as I have already told you, I had communicated with my partner, and, although Coyne assured me that he knew nothing whatever of Thomas Morgan, and had never heard of him, he advised that although he appeared to be an eccentric client, he was good pay, and we had better hold on to him."

"What have you done with the hundred thousand dollars?"

"I deposited it to the private account of Mr. Coyne."

"And notified him, of course, of what you had done?"

"Certainly."

"Have you heard from him since? Your partner, I mean?"

"Only the other day. He is slow at answering letters."

"What did he have to say about the matter?"

"He advised that I let things go on as they were until his arrival home, which would be soon."

"How soon?"

"I cannot say, exactly. Within a few weeks, I suppose."

"Has Morgan ever written to you in the strain that he employed when writing to me?"

"Never."

"Has he never suggested that he stood in dread of a violent death?"

"He has never even hinted it."

"What were his other letters about?"

"Without exception, save for those connected with the will and these two, they were merely requests for me to forward him suggestions for investment."

"Have you done so?"

"Certainly."

"Has he acted upon any of your suggestions?"

"Not once—more than to say that this or that one did not impress him as a thing he desired."

"Did you inform him of the absence of your partner?"

"At once."

"What did he say to that?"

"Merely that he supposed that I could attend to the business until the return of Mr. Coyne."

"How long a time have you and Mr. Coyne been in partnership?" asked Nick, who began to wish to know something about the other member of the firm.

"Two years—that is, almost two years. It lacks two months of that time, to be exact."

"You are old friends? Old acquaintances, I presume," ventured the detective, idly, and rising to adjust the shade at the window as he asked the question.

"Mr. Coyne and I came together through an advertisement," was the somewhat problematical answer; and Nick did not then continue the subject.

Instead, he rose from his chair as if about to take his leave, and said:

"I think I will take a run out to Spotstown and look over matters a little on my own account, Mr. Clark."

"Wait, Mr. Carter," said Clark, also rising.

Nick resumed his chair, and the lawyer did likewise.

"Well?" said the detective, when the hiatus that followed had continued for some time.

"I was about to suggest that you go out there and investigate this matter—on our account," said the lawyer.

"By the word 'our' do you refer to your firm?" asked Nick.

"I did—yes."

"You forget that one member of the firm is not present".

Nick Carter smiled as he said this, for the remark was really without meaning, since one member of a firm is bound by the acts of another; but he had a meaning in mind which was deeper than his words, and he was curious to see if Clark would take it.

He did; and at once.

"On my account, then," he said; and he added, hastily: "If your charges are not too expensive for me. Mr. Coyne is the moneyed man of this concern. I am a poor man."

"I don't think we will quarrel about the charges," said the detective, smiling again.

"In that case, sir, I would like you to investigate this matter for me. I know you well by reputation, Mr. Carter, that I am sure I am acting wisely in retaining you. The fact is that I am so upset by the whole matter that I do not know what to do."

"Very well," said Nick. "If you will give me the authority of the firm to act for you, I will go to Spotstown this afternoon; but I would like to make one condition about the matter."

"What is that, Mr. Carter?"

"Merely that if your partner should return unexpectedly, you will not inform him of my connection with the case—gratuitously. I mean by that only that you are to inform him about it when it becomes necessary to do so, and not before."

"I will readily agree to that, for that is the understanding I would prefer myself."

"Very good. If you will write the authority, I will consider myself engaged."

It was done, and the detective placed the letter in his pocket.

"Now," said Nick, when that was effected, "would you mind telling me something more about Mr. Coyne?"

"What do you wish to know about him?"

"How did you happen to come together in a partnership?"

"Through an advertisement."

"Who advertised? You—or he?"

"He did."

"What was the advertisement?"

"It was to the effect that a lawyer desired a young and ambitious partner; capital not necessary. I responded and was accepted."

"You had never met before that time?"

"No."

"That was two years ago?"

"Very nearly so."

"Will you tell me something more about the arrangements that were made between you?"

"I found Mr. Coyne to be rather an eccentric, although a strangely fascinating, man. He was half an invalid at that time. His desire was simply to establish an office. He had no practice to bring to it, but he was a wealthy man, and he supplied these offices and clerks as you see them now."

"What about the time since the partnership was formed?"

"Mr. Coyne has been out of the city the greater part of the time. When he is here, he comes to the office in the morning, enters his private office and remains there until he goes away again for the day. Sometimes he calls me in to talk with him, but he never sees a client or attends to any of the business of the firm. If I attempt to consult him about a matter, he waves his hand and leaves it all to me."

"And so you think—what, Mr. Clark?"

"I think that he is a rich man who merely wishes to appear to be working at his profession; who wishes

to use stationery with his name upon it; who likes to see his name on the door and on the directory at the foot of the elevator shaft; who, in other words, wishes to pose as doing business without actually doing any at all."

"Where does Mr. Coyne reside when he is in the city?"

"In the bachelor apartments in the 'Commanche.'"

The detective left his chair again; but again the lawyer detained him.

"I wish you would tell me why you ask these questions about my partner, Mr. Carter," he said.

"I do it merely because I regard it as strange that a client whom you do not know, and whom your partner claims never to have heard of, should retain your firm as his attorneys, forwarding a retainer fee of one thousand dollars at the same time, and that he should appoint this man, who is traveling in Europe, as his trustee—evidently of a considerable amount of property—without ever having seen or heard of him."

"In short, Mr. Carter, you mean to suggest to me that you do not quite believe Mr. Coyne when he says that he does not know this man, or never knew him or heard of him."

"That is about the size of it, Mr. Clark."

"I don't think I blame you for that opinion."

"That is because you more than half share it yourself."

"I will have to confess that it is; and yet I am positively ashamed to distrust my own partner on such a flimsy pretext."

"It is your innate honesty which distrusts him; your heart, and not your brain, Clark."

"Yes; I think you are correct in that diagnosis."

"You stated a moment ago that he was slow at answering letters."

"Yes."

"Has he always been so?"

"Yes; there have been few exceptions."

"When did those exceptions occur?"

"The first time he went abroad. He was quite prompt in replying to my letters then—for a time."

"Where was he—in Europe, I mean—at that time?"

"Oh! everywhere. London, Paris, Berlin, Madrid, Ro——"

"Madrid! Did you get many letters from him from there?"

"Yes. More than from any other place, I think. He said that the air there agreed with him, you know."

"Exactly. About when was that? When he was in Madrid?"

"Something a little more than a year ago, I think."

"And where is he now? Where are the letters that you have received?"

"From London. He is staying there now, under the care of a specialist of some kind."

"By the way, what is his trouble? From what form of disease does he suffer?"

"Something akin to locomotor ataxia, I think. He has never been very steady on his legs since I have known him, but he reports that is almost entirely cured now. He expects to be quite sound when he returns."

"Tell me about how long a time elapses between the posting of your letters to him, and the receipt of a reply."

"Anywhere from four to six weeks."

"Humph! I've got an idea, Mr. Clarke, but I won't tell it to you now. Have you ever had occasion to cable him?"

"No; for the reason that he forbade me doing so."

"He did, eh? What is his address in London?"

"The Agamemnon, Piccadilly."

"Don't you regard this affair of the death of your mysterious client as of sufficient importance to be cabled to your partner, despite the fact that he has expressed the wish that you would not make use of the cable?"

"Yes, I do. I was turning that very question over in my mind when you entered the office."

"Then let me advise that you cable to him at once."

"I will do so."

"May I suggest the wording of the cable message? I have an idea about it which I would like to act upon."

"Certainly. I will be glad to have you do so."

The detective pulled a sheet of paper toward him, and wrote for two or three minutes. He then gave it to the lawyer.

"Read it," he said. "It is only a suggestion. You may, of course, make any alterations you desire, or express it in cipher, if you have one with him."

"Thomas Morgan murdered. Trusteeship devolves upon you. Can you return at once? Answer."

Such was the message written by the detective, and the lawyer expressed his entire approval.

"I will send it at once," he said.

"If you will permit me," said Nick, "I will send it for you. For one reason, I can frank it and so save you the expense; or another, I am going out now and can attend to it as well as not."

"Very well," replied the lawyer. "If you will do so, I will be greatly obliged."

But the message which Nick Carter did send when he visited the cable office a little later was a much longer one: it was addressed to one of the inspectors at Scotland Yard, and it requested him to have a cable message made up, over there, embodying the very words he had outlined while in the lawyer's office, and then to make the effort to deliver it to Philip Coyne in person—and to report progress at once.

As he turned away from the cable office, the detective remarked *sotto voce:*

"If Philip Coyne is at the Agamemnon, Piccadilly, in person, he will receive the message intended for him, all right; if he is not, and I don't believe he is, it won't be long before I will be wiser than I am now regarding this complicated case."

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRIMINAL'S END OF THE GAME.

We have seen now exactly what it was which led up to the visit of the detective, accompanied by his assistant, to the village of Spotstown.

He did not await the reply to his cable to London before making his departure, but he did receive a wire from Washington—from Chief Wilkie—to the effect that the clergy of the Cathedral of San Juan de Uloa, in Madrid, had recently received a letter, mailed from New York City, in which an offer had been made to return to them many of the stolen jewels on condition that full amnesty be given to the person who returned them.

The cathedral had repudiated the offer with scorn, and there the matter closed; but it was important in the fact that it established the truth of the assumption that the man who had murdered the priest and stolen the fortune from the cathedral had really fled to New York.

It was the middle of the afternoon when the detective and his assistant arrived in the village of Spotstown, and they proceeded at once to the rooms formerly occupied by Thomas Morgan—and they did it so quietly, going one at a time, that, notwithstanding the vigilant eyes of the inhabitants, they succeeded in invading the rooms without their presence there being suspected.

From three o'clock until after darkness had settled over the village, the two detectives worked side by side in the rooms of Thomas Morgan, searching them.

And, in a measure, their search was rewarded.

The detective discovered a book in which it appeared that Thomas Morgan had purported to keep a journal of events as they happened to him since his arrival in the town.

This journal was, in effect, a repetition of the substance of the letters the detective had received, although, of course, it went much more into detail.

It mentioned in several places the fortune in money and jewels which the man was supposed to possess, but it represented the amount as being considerably less than half of the sum that was claimed by the representatives of the cathedral to have been stolen.

It made no mention of the murder of the priest, and it referred in no way to Madrid.

It did not even admit that the property had been stolen, although it hinted that such was the fact, while at the same time it seemed to attempt to deny that the maker of the journal was personally responsible for the thefts—rather, it suggested that he had become possessed of the property without having actual knowledge of the source from which it was derived.

Altogether it was a very clever compilation.

Too clever by far, the detective thought; and he was also impressed by the belief in his own mind, which amounted almost to conviction, that the journal had been made up in considerable haste, and had not been filled from time to time covering the entire period of the writer's residence in Spotstown.

Among the papers, also, they discovered a key to several of the hiding places of parts or portions of the fortune.

In fact, they found everything which they had been led to expect they would find, in the rooms; but their discoveries came much too easily, and the result of it was that when their searches were completed, and they had seated themselves in the back room to talk it over, the first remark made by the detective was significant of the conjectures which had been crowding through his brain ever since the moment when he started out on the case that morning.

"Chick," he said, "it looks to me as if the whole thing was a deliberate plant."

"Well," replied Chick, "if it is, it is a good one."

"One of the slickest I ever saw, Chick."

"Tell me what you make of it," requested the assistant.

"Why, in a word. I make out of it simply a new application of the very old system of using a double—or, perhaps, in this case, a triple—identity in order to avoid the consequences of crime."

"Eh? Do you mean that?"

"Certainly I mean it."

"I didn't suppose you had gone as deeply into it as all that."

"What did you think, Chick? Tell me your own ideas on the subject."

"I can't say that I really have any very definite ideas."

"But such as they are, give them to me."

"Well, I look upon all this business, here in this room, as a plant, just as you do, but I have thought that it was a plant laid merely to throw investigators off the scent. I had not gone into it quite as deeply as you have."

The detective leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigar.

"Suppose we indulge in a little recapitulation," he said.

Chick made no reply, but he leaned forward in an expectant attitude.

"First," said Nick, "we must attempt to put ourselves in Morgan's place—for that Morgan is—or was—the man who murdered the priest and stole the jewels and fortune from the cathedral in Madrid, I have not a doubt."

"No; that seems to be established," said Chick.

"'Put yourself in his place,' is a pretty good maxim to bank on."

"It certainly is."

"Very well. It goes without saying that the man who murdered the priest and afterward swiped the jewels, was not a cripple, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"And Morgan, so far as we know, was a cripple—or is one."

"I gather from that that you have doubts about the identity of the man who was murdered; eh?"

"Yes; I have decided doubts; but we are putting ourselves in Morgan's place just now."

"Exactly."

"First, then, we must assume that long before the robbery of the cathedral was attempted every act connected with it, which led up to it and which followed it, was carefully and adroitly planned, and that it was done with the utmost system."

"Sure."

"Of course we cannot take up that part of it at the present moment; we can only build upon what we know."

"Of course."

"Then, first, we know that Morgan came to this village a year ago, and established himself in these rooms."

"Yes."

"Where he came from, or why he came here, does not appear, save that he let it be known that he was seeking quiet and seclusion; as a matter of fact, we know that he came here because he wished to be gossiped about."

"I don't quite see that."

"Chick, there is no place in the world like a small village for gossip."

"That is true enough."

"In a great city like New York, one is instantly lost sight of; in a place like this, one is never lost sight of."

"Well, for that very reason, I should have supposed that Morgan would have sought the city instead of the village."

"That was no part of his game—to be lost sight of. He wished to remain in full view."

"But why?"

"In order that when he did disappear, the disappearance would be final; in order that there could be no doubt about it; in order that the crimes he had committed [illegible] to be traced, with very little difficulty, directly to him; in order that when two and two were put together, and it was discovered, beyond the peradventure of a doubt, that he was the man who robbed the cathedral, a part—and a very small part in comparison with the whole—of the stolen property might be discovered and restored to its owners."

"I think I begin to see your point, but it is not quite clear yet."

"Why, the whole scheme—if I am correct—lies in a nutshell. Suppose, for example, that Morgan is dead?"

"Yes."

"The Morgan we are searching for."

"Yes."

"The Morgan who committed the murder and the thefts at the cathedral in Madrid."

"Yes."

"Very well, then, we will say—and this is a supposition, mind you—we will say that we have traced him down; that we have discovered a considerable part of the stolen property; that we have also found the dead body of the man who committed the murder and the thefts; what more is there left to do?"

"Nothing—more than to establish what we have discovered, and close the case."

"Exactly. And that, Chick, according to my ideas, is precisely what he wished us to do."

"I see now. I see your double identity theory. You mean that while he is supposed to be dead, he is not; that while we know that we have recovered only a small portion of the stolen property, and have decided that what remains is so securely hidden away that it will never be found, Morgan is quietly living somewhere else, under another name, and that he has two or three millions left to spend."

"Precisely."

"But why should he take all this trouble to identify himself as the murderer and thief when, in the actual commission of the crimes, he left no trace whatever behind him, and need not really have lived in any fear of discovery, so long as he remained quiet?"

"I will answer your question in one word."

"Well?"

"Superstition."

"I don't understand."

"There is a great deal of difference between robbing a church and robbing a bank, son."

"The result is about the same—provided there is enough in the church."

"No; the result is not the same in any case, for in robbing a church, the thief steals, beside the property he absorbs, a regular Pandora's box filled to the brim with superstitions."

"I don't catch on yet."

"The church—the Catholic church especially—never lets go, Chick."

"I admit that."

"It builds cathedrals a stone at a time, and sometimes the process of construction covers three or four generations, but one takes up the work where another drops it, and at last the edifice is completed, a finished temple."

"Well?"

"So with a man who offends it, or with a thief who steals from it; it never lets go."

"I see."

"Morgan knew that pursuit of him would never flag, unless it were known beyond a doubt that he was dead."

"Yes."

"And his superstition told him that some day he would be found, tried and convicted, unless he could succeed in convincing the church that he was dead."

"I am on to the point now."

"So, although he left no trace behind him when the crimes were committed, he came here to this small village, in order to establish an identity which could be connected directly with the robbery and murder. Then he has himself murdered—in effect—the crimes are traced to him too late. He is dead and buried, supposedly; a part of the property is recovered, the rest of it remains so well hidden that recovery is impossible; the doctor who has attended him has sworn to his identity and—the incident is closed."

"By Jove, Nick!"

"And so, also, perishes his superstitious terrors. He no longer fears that arm of the church which has been reaching out for him in the dark, and which he saw extended in his direction from every shadow. That arm has become palsied by the unquestionable evidence of his death!"

"I see! I see it all now."

"But there is a weak point in his armor, somewhere—there must be—and we will find it."

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLOTTING OF A BOLD CRIMINAL.

"Now," said the detective, after a moment's pause, "let us take up the conduct of Morgan since his arrival here."

"Yes."

"His first care was to establish an identity which he believed could not be questioned."

"Yes."

"So he came here and secured these rooms, in the only block in the village, directly opposite the hotel."

"Yes."

"He is a cripple, and he keeps a negro body servant. That of itself attracts attention to him."

"Certainly."

"Next he opens an account at the village bank. He places ten thousand dollars to his credit there; and that is another clincher on his identity."

"Surely."

"Next, he calls in the village doctor to attend him, and that is in preparation for the great event which is to set the community among these people. And right here we approach a point which we must take up later, Chick."

"What is that?"

"I more than half believe that the doctor—for pay, and good, big pay—might have been taken partly into his confidence. But we will look into that later. Now, what is his next move in the game he is playing?"

"You are diagnosing this case, old chap."

"Morgan sends a letter to me."

"Sure thing. Several of them."

"He probably knows enough about me to know that I will pay no attention to his letters until something else happens to compel me to do so—for example, the report of his own death by murder."

"I see."

"He banks upon that view of it—of the case—and it turns out that he is correct. I receive so many letters to which no attention is paid, that I treat his with the same indifference that I do hundreds of others. All the same, this man knows that when the time comes to have himself killed I will appear on the scene, he thinks that I will show the letters, he believes that I will reveal the fact that he has confessed himself to be a great criminal, it is through me that he leads to the discovery, and, therefore, the recovery of a part of the stolen property, and so—don't you see?—the identification of the murdered man is made complete by no less an authority than Nick Carter."

"Say, Nick, that was a clever move on his part."

"Not so clever as some other things I believe he has done."

"What, for instance?"

"Wait till I finish."

"All right."

"Next he retains a firm of lawyers—and always he does everything by letter."

"Yes."

"He makes a will in which he leaves everything he possesses to one of these lawyers, in the form of a trust which will only be revealed at the pleasure of the trustee—and right there, his financial affairs disappear into a cloud too dense to penetrate. There is nobody to contest his will, save the public administrator, and he never does it in a case of this sort, so Mr. Philip Coyne, the trustee, has a free hand. Don't you see that once more we have what appears on the face of it to be an unquestionable establishment of identity?"

"That's as true as you live."

"Certainly. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the trustee—Coyne—will ultimately make public some sort of a letter in which it is stated that the greater part of the property—if there appears to be any—is left to distant relatives in some other country." Mr. Coyne will go there to reside with them, and he will bring back a full discharge from his responsibilities, which will make him square with the world."

"But all this, Nick, presupposes that Coyne is an accomplice in all this."

"Coyne is more than an accomplice—if he is anything at all."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that unless Coyne is entirely innocent, he is Morgan himself."

"Gee whizz, Nick!"

"Coyne formed his copartnership with Clark through an advertisement, almost a year before the robbery and murder were committed in Madrid."

"Well?"

"He posed as a man of means who simply wanted an office and the appearance of doing business; he got both, as well as considerable real business through the man whom he selected to become his partner."

"Yes."

"He played the game—or he really is—of being half an invalid. He suffers, or pretends to suffer, from a mild form of locomotor ataxia, and that is practically—so far as I have been able to ascertain—the same form of trouble which has made Morgan a cripple."

"That might be merely a coincidence."

"Of course. I don't deny that; but also, it might be a form of disease which Morgan is expert in imitating. And right here I will venture a guess that the doctor, when we see him, will suggest that Morgan was not really a cripple at all, and he will do that in order to cover up the tracks of a possible discovery, or to forestall what might be said by the physicians who examine the dead body."

We have already seen that Nick was correct in this surmise.

"But isn't it rather far-fetched," asked Chick, "to connect Coyne with this affair, already?"

"Perhaps it is and perhaps it is not. Anyhow, it is the way I read the puzzle."

"His partner says that he is in Europe, and has been there more than a year."

"So has Morgan been here about a year—or a little more; eh?"

"That's true."

"Europe—the Agamemnon, in Piccadilly—is a cracking good alibi to establish; eh?"

"Why, sure; but——"

"Particularly if there happens to be a dummy there all the time to represent the principal who is here, in Spotstown, posing as an invalid."

The assistant shook his head incredulously.

"That plot is too deep for me to follow it," he said.

"It is deep, to be sure, but it is as simple as the nose on your face when you look at it consecutively."

"I find I lose the spot where I fall down. I cannot see it consecutively."

"Shall we suppose a case, then?"

"I wish you would, in order to make it quite clear to me."

"Very well. We will take Morgan for the suppositious name."

"All right."

"We will say that he is originally an archæologist."

"What the dev——"

"Wait. Three out of five of that cult are treasure hunters. Did that never occur to you, Chick?"

"I can't say that it ever did."

"In our suppositious case, we will say that in his researches Morgan has discovered the existence of this great fortune in the Cathedral of San Juan de Uloa. He studies it, and makes up his mind that it can be stolen if one goes about it in the right way."

"Humph!"

"He decides to take the right way, which is to prepare himself beforehand, thoroughly, so that after the thing is done, there will be no possibility of tracing him."

"Well?"

"Without doubt he consumes years in his preparations. He goes to Madrid; he studies the personnel and the habits of the men in whose care the fortune reposes. Doubtless he becomes a friend of the very man whom he later murders."

"That is not pleasant to contemplate."

"No; but it is more than likely true."

"Well, go ahead with the suppositious case."

"About a year before the grand coup, Morgan appears in New York under another name. He advertises for a partner in the law business. He finds one. The partnership is created, and then his health gives out again. He finds that he must go to Europe to take the baths, or something of the sort."

"It is an interesting story, all right."

"Now he has created his home base. After all is accomplished, he has only to return to New York and resume a law practice which his partner has been carrying forward for him in the meantime. Who will connect him with Morgan?"

"You will. You appear to be doing it."

"Oh! well, wait."

"Well?"

"He has established an identity which cannot be questioned, from any apparent point. He has a partner who cares for the business. He is himself in London, and his partner is in correspondence with him; Morgan is here in Spotstown.

"Perhaps there is a dummy at the Agamemnon, in London, and perhaps there isn't. Whether there is or not, the letters to and from London take a long time in transit—quite long enough for the round trip to be made twice.

"Now, to return to the direct case.

"Morgan [illegible] his several parts there to perfection, and he gets away with the goods, and then we have"—Nick held up two

fingers suggestively—"Morgan, the cripple, in Spotstown, and Coyne, suffering from locomotor ataxia, in London.

"Next, we have Morgan carrying out his original plans.

"He writes letters to a detective, and he writes to the firm of lawyers he has created.

"In the letters to the detective he prepares the finishing touches of his ultimate identification as the murderer of Madrid, the robber of the cathedral and for a restoration of a part of the stolen property. In his letters to the lawyers—and don't forget that these all go to the innocent partner—he arranges, legally, for the final disposition of all of the remainder of the stolen goods, while at the same time he covers up his tracks so well that he believes there will be left no possibility of tracing them.

"There is your suppositious case, just exactly as I see the real one."

"The climax has come. Morgan—or a man supposed to be Morgan—has been murdered according to program. His will has been made, and Coyne has been made trustee under it. It only remains now for Clark, his partner, who is utterly innocent of all connection with the affair, to notify him of the death of Morgan, and then, in his own good time, Coyne, who is in reality the murderer and the thief, appears on the scene, apparently from Europe, and he finds the wad, which he has taken so much trouble to get, awaiting him. There is nothing left for him to do but to enjoy it, is there?"

"But, I say, Nick."

"Well?"

"No matter which way you turn, there are two dead men here in Spotstown."

"That is true enough."

"Who are they? And who killed them?"

"That is something which we have got to find out."

"If Morgan is not the dead man—or, rather, if the dead man is not Morgan, why, then, it was Morgan who killed them both, eh? And if Morgan is really Coyne, then Coyne is the man who killed them. It seems to ... "

Nick interrupted him, laughing.

"It's a complicated case, all right, isn't it, Chick? And ... my word, it seems an awfully simple ... to me; but—it isn't finished yet."

CHAPTER VIII

... the ... which the detective had with Dr. Harris, save that at the conclusion of the statement of the suppositious case both detectives crossed the street to the small hotel, to get their supper.

After that Nick returned to the rooms alone to telephone to the doctor, as we have already seen, and Chick followed him a few moments later, as we know.

And now, if you please, we will return to the interview with the doctor.

"Dr. Harris," said the detective, after a short pause, "my principal reason in applying to you was to ask you something about the antecedents of Thomas Morgan, for I supposed that, as his regular physician, you would have learned something."

"Well, I did not. All that I discovered was founded on pure guesswork, and has no foundation save in surmise."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me about your surmises regarding him."

"Surmises are not generally regarded as important, are they?" asked the doctor.

"No; not generally; but there may be exceptions."

"As—for instance——"

"As, for instance, I should suppose that a man who is as intelligent as you are, would be apt to guess rather close to the mark."

"Oh! well, perhaps so. And still——"

"And still—what?"

"It is hardly in good form to speak in a manner which might cast unpleasant reflections upon a man who is dead."

"I don't understand you, sir."

"I mean to imply that if my surmises are correct at all, they suggest that Thomas Morgan was anything rather than what he appeared to be."

"How so, doctor?"

"If you will give me your word not to quote me, I will tell you exactly what I mean."

"I will promise not to quote you."

"Then I will admit that I could never disabuse my mind of the idea that Morgan had committed some great crime, somewhere in the world, and was here in hiding—under cover, as criminals would call it."

"Will you tell me what gave you that idea?"

"... that is definite. It was simply the result of my communications with him."

"You felt that there was a mystery about him?"

"Yes; always."

... you believed that ... to ... some form of crime?"

"Yes: I did."

"Did you ever, even by innuendo, mention any part of your suspicions to him?"

The doctor laughed aloud.

"It is quite plain that you never saw the man," he said.

"Why so?"

"Because you would not have asked that question."

"No? Why not?"

"You had only to look into his eyes to tell that he was not the sort of a man to be lightly trifled with. Cripple though he was—or pretended to be—he had the very devil in his eyes."

"You don't say so!"

"He really did. I always felt some sort of a creepy fear of the man, even at times when we were engaged in a game of chess."

"He inspired you with some sort of dread, then?"

"Decidedly."

"I wish you would describe him to me. His personal appearance, I mean."

"You have not seen the corpse, then?"

"Not yet; and, besides, I understand that the face has been mutilated by the murderer."

"Oh, yes, so it has! I forgot to mention that, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"That is rather a queer thing, too."

"How so?"

"One could swear that the murderer attempted to cut the figure of a cross upon his features."

"The figure of a cross?"

"Yes; there is a strip of skin and flesh torn away from brow to chin, and another across the nose from ear to ear."

"Indeed! I should suppose, doctor, that such disfigurement would interfere with identification," said the detective, quietly and without apparent interest. He had brought the subject around now to where he wanted it.

"It might do so under ordinary circumstances," admitted the physician, "but not in this case."

"Why not in this particular case?"

"Because, while there should be no doubt about the identity even in any case, since he was found in his wheel chair and with his servant beside him; since he wore clothes that were recognized, and which is all [illegible] there were many other lesser [illegible] I could have made the identification even if the head had been missing and the clothing had been changed. I was his doctor."

"Ah, yes. True."

"I have made examinations of his body many times. I have had him stripped for those examinations. I could not have been deceived."

"Surely not."

"The murdered man is Thomas Morgan, all right."

"Then I think we may pass from that point for the present."

"Decidedly so."

"And now, if you will be good enough to do so, I would like to hear your description of him as he appeared when he was alive."

"Oh, well, I am not especially good at that sort of thing."

"You may do better than you suppose you can. At all events, have a try at it."

"He was tall and dark, with dark eyes——"

"Something like your own?"

"He was about my complexion, only rather more swarthy—yes."

"And his eyes?"

"They were about the color of mine, I think, only that they were always rather bloodshot in appearance, and there were always dark shadows under them."

"Such as an invalid might have, eh?"

"Yes; about that idea."

"Was he about your build?"

"He was heavier, I should say; quite so."

"And his hair?"

"His hair was originally black, but now quite streaked with gray. He wore it very long, for a man, too."

"And beard? Did he wear a beard?"

"Yes; black once, but now quite gray."

"How was it trimmed?"

"I don't think he ever trimmed it at all, unless he did it with an ax. It was usually shaggy and unkempt, although in other respects the man was a model of neatness. But, I say, I don't know why the devil you should want to know all these things from me."

"Why, it is all in the line of investigation, you know; that is all. We detectives——"

"Yes, yes. Well, what more?"

"I suppose in the mutilation of the face, as it was found after his death, that shaggy beard was partly destroyed, eh?"

"Naturally so."

"But still, you are quite positive about the identification, are you?"

"Great Scott! haven't I told you that again and again, and given you my reasons, also?"

"Certainly. But it is a point——"

"Oh, you detectives are all alike. You go at the trivial things, and let the big ones take care of themselves."

"I suppose it does seem so to outsiders—sometimes," replied the detective, quietly.

"It certainly does."

"From your association with the man, doctor, can you assign any motive for this crime?"

The doctor seemed to hesitate before he replied, and the detective repeated the question.

"I should not assign one if it were not for the act of mutilation," he said, then.

"Ah! You think that has its significance, do you?"

"There seems no doubt of it to me."

"Let me hear your theory about it."

"Why, I should say that the man was killed for revenge, and that the rude attempt at making the sign of a cross upon his features had something to do with it."

"I see, or think I see, then, that the murder is connected in some way with the crimes which you suppose this man has committed in the past."

"Possibly."

"That would explain, also, why Morgan wrote letters to me, wouldn't it?"

"I should suppose that it would?"

"Now, doctor, I had another reason for wishing to see you before I viewed the bodies of the murdered men."

"What was that?"

"I wanted to ask you to go with me while I did so."

"Why?"

"Principally because it is more than likely that questions which I would like to ask you will occur to me while I am viewing the bodies."

"Huh! Well, if such questions should occur to you, there is nothing to prevent you from returning here and asking them, is there?"

"I suppose not. It is merely a question of time."

"Well, I have seen all that I care to of those bodies for one day, so I reckon you can go it alone, Carter."

"All right. By the way——"

"What?"

"That theory of revenge of yours in regard to the murder of Morgan would hardly apply to the servant, would it?"

"I don't know why it wouldn't."

"How could it apply?"

"You see, the nigger had been in the employ of Morgan for years, and——"

"How do you know that?"

"Morgan told me—more than once."

"Oh!"

"He had been in Morgan's employ for years—how many I do not know, but a good many, that is certain. If that is true, isn't it likely that he might have been mixed up with his master in those old crimes?"

"You seem to be taking those 'old crimes' for granted."

"Well, I do."

"In that case, why wasn't the negro's face also marked with the sign of a cross?"

"I don't know, unless it was an oversight."

"An oversight!"

The detective started; then he smiled; then he glanced keenly at the doctor, and smiled again, and then he said:

"Thank you."

"I don't know what the devil you are thanking me for!" replied the doctor, testily.

"Why, for a valuable suggestion. I don't think I would have thought of that. I fear it might not have occurred to me at all, and yet it is plainly—quite plainly—the reason why the servant was not mutilated as well as his master. Don't you think, so, doctor?"

And the detective smiled again, beamingly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY OF THE TELEPHONE GIRL.

Chick, from his corner, thought he could perceive that the doctor moved rather uneasily in his chair, as if the delicate insinuation in the voice and manner of the detective had disturbed him.

Nick left his chair, as if he were about to take his departure, although in reality he had no such intention, for almost immediately he resumed his seat again.

"By the way," he said, "there is another thing."

"Yes?" replied the doctor, with visible impatience, for he had supposed the interview ended.

"Yes," said Nick. "You were the person who discovered the bodies, were you not?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me how it happened?"

"I was driving past the place, and saw them. That is all."

"It is rather a lonely spot, is it not?"

"Quite so."

"On a road which is used only infrequently?"

"Yes."

"Do you often drive that way?"

"I have been driving that way every day for more than a week. I have a patient further along that same road."

"Oh, I see! What time was it when you discovered the bodies?"

"I left here at about half-past seven, so it was, say, eight o'clock when I discovered the bodies."

"It could not have been just a little bit earlier than that, could it?"

"I don't think it could. Why?"

"Oh, it is unimportant, but I will tell you in a moment. Will you tell me just what you did when you discovered the bodies? When you first saw them, I mean."

"I leaped from my buggy and ran toward them."

"Naturally. I suppose, at the moment, that it did not occur to you that they were dead?"

"Eh? No. Certainly not. They were both seated in quite a natural manner, you know, and, from my point of vantage, seemed quite lifelike."

"How far were they from the road where you stopped your horse?"

"Twenty or thirty yards."

"You were not long in discovering that a murder had been committed, were you?"

"I should say not."

"What did you do then?"

"There is a house which stands back from the road about half a mile further on. I went there, and sent the man who lives there down to Devil's Hole to watch over the bodies until I could notify the town authorities of the affair."

"And then?"

"I hastened on to the house where my patient lives, for I knew there was a telephone there which I could use."

"So it was from the residence of your patient that you gave the information of your unpleasant discovery, at Devil's Hole, eh?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Lord, in just what manner you gave that information?"

"Look here, Mr. Detective, I don't pretend to know what in the devil you mean by asking me all these insolent questions! What in blazes difference does it make who I notified or how I gave the notification, eh?"

"I don't know that it makes any particular difference, save to satisfy my curiosity. I merely wished to know who it was you called up on the telephone, that is all."

"I didn't call up anybody. I told the girl at the exchange to do that."

"Oh, I see!"

"As soon as the central office——"

"By the way, the central office is at Cresville, isn't it?"

"Yes. As soon as I got an answer from central, I told her that I had found the dead bodies of Tom Morgan and his nigger, on the edge of Devil's Hole, and asked her to notify the constable at Spotstown, and that he would do the rest."

"Did you mention the mutilation of Mr. Morgan's face to her?"

"No, I did not."

"Did you ask her to notify any other person than the constable?"

"Who the devil else would I ask her to notify? Eh?"

"Morgan's lawyers, for instance."

For an instant of time, which was so short that anybody less observant than the detective would not have noticed it, the doctor seemed to shrink into himself, as if in some way he had committed a blunder which he regretted, but which it was now too late to rectify; but instantly he resumed his natural air, and replied:

"I know nothing about Morgan's lawyers."

"Let me see," murmured Nick, musingly. "You left home at seven-thirty; you discovered the bodies at eight; you spent perhaps ten minutes there, don't you think so?"

"Doubtless."

"Then you drove to the house from which you sent the man to watch over the two corpses until the constable should arrive?"

"Yes."

"That house stands back from the road?"

"Well, what of it?"

"And after that you returned to the main road, and drove some distance further, until you arrived at the house where your patient lives? Then you had to hitch your horse——"

"What in thunder are you trying to get at?" demanded the doctor, impatiently.

"I am trying to get at the time you telephoned the information to the central office in Cresville, as nearly as

possible. You could not have done it much before nine o'clock, could you?"

"As it happens, I know exactly what time I did it, for I looked at my watch when I did so, in order to remember."

"That was a good idea. What time was it?"

"Just a quarter of nine when I called up central."

"Are you quite positive about that?"

"Certainly I am positive! What——"

"What time have you got now, doctor?" asked Nick, interrupting him, and pulling his own watch from his pocket.

"Ten-thirty," replied the doctor, snappishly, glancing hurriedly at his watch and returning it again to his pocket.

"Our watches exactly agree," said the detective, as if he were musing upon some thought which had just occurred to him.

"Well, what of it?"

"And my watch exactly agrees with the clock in the lawyer's office in New York."

"What the dev——"

"And the young lady in the telephone office telephoned information about the murders to that office at exactly half-past eight."

"But she could not have done that, you know——"

"And at half-past eight, before you telephoned to her at all, mind you, she, therefore, not only knew that the murders had been committed, and where the bodies were to be found, but she also knew about the mutilation of Morgan's face, which you did not tell her at all. All that is rather strange, isn't it, doctor?"

"Mighty strange," he replied, sullenly.

"How would you explain it?"

"I don't think I should attempt to explain it at all. I should ask her to do that."

"Did she say, when you told her about the bodies, that she already knew them to be where you said they were?"

"No; she made no remark about it at all."

"Then I think I had better see her; don't you?"

"Yes," replied the doctor, showing his teeth in a cynical smile; "I think, if I were you, that I should see her at once, by all means."

"Did it rain in Crowville this evening, doctor?"

"It sprinkled a bit——" he caught himself. Suddenly, as if some scene on a stage had been set before his remark. "—but never there, so I was told by one of my patients. Why?"

"Nothing at all. Do you suppose that the same young woman who was at the telephone at the time you called her up this morning would be on duty now?"

"More than likely," replied the physician, and this time his smile was plainly forced. And he added:

"There are two on duty from nine in the morning until nine at night, and only one is there from nine at night until nine in the morning."

"I see that there is a telephone at your elbow; would you mind calling her up, and asking her how it happened that she was possessed of the information about the murders before you telephoned it to her this morning?"

Dr. Harris pushed the receiver across the desk toward the detective.

"Ask her yourself!" he said, crossly. "You will be better satisfied then."

Nick picked the receiver from the hook and placed it against his ear, and he held it here for a long time without receiving any response.

"She doesn't answer," he said to the doctor.

"Doubtless she has fallen asleep at her post," replied Harris, with a shrug.

"She may have been murdered at her post," said the detective, quietly; and this time he certainly succeeded in producing a visible effect upon the physician, for the man started bolt upright in his chair.

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"She doesn't answer," said Nick, without attempting an explanation.

"That is no reason for you to make such an assertion as you have done."

"Assertion? I made no assertion. I merely said that she might also have been murdered. Murder seems to be in the air around here just now. However, as you say, she is doubtless sleeping. I don't suppose there is much use for the telephone at night around here, is there?"

"Only for the doctors; and even such calls are rare," replied the doctor, evidently relieved.

The detective rose to his feet again.

"I think I have bored you long enough for one night, doctor," he said. "I hope, in my zeal, that I have not offended you?"

"Oh, not at all—not at all. I shall be glad to give you all the assistance in my power; but, as I said in the beginning, the case seems to be shrouded in mystery."

"It does, indeed. Good-night. I will see you in the morning."

Outside in the darkness of the night, and under the shadow of lilac bushes, which grew in profusion near the front gate, the detective placed one hand on his assistant's shoulder, and said to him:

"Your place is here, Chick."

"I supposed so."

"I would not be a bit surprised if the doctor should try to light out during the night, for I have said enough to scare him half to death the moment he has time to think it all over. I as much as told him that he had both feet in the mire of this case, and he means to skip before morning, if I am any judge. Did you see the spots of spattered dust on his boots, and the marks of big rain drops on his hat, in the hall? Eh?"

"Yes, I did."

"And you also saw the heavy clouds in the sky over toward Cresville just before dark, didn't you? There was the edge of a shower over there this evening, Chick, and Dr. Harris was in it. I think that he went over there to see that telephone girl, and that his call upon her will explain why she has not answered the telephone to-night. Anyhow, I'm going over there to find out—and I'm going to steal the doctor's horse to do it, too."

"That's a good idea."

"It is good for more reasons than one. For one thing, it is handy; for another, I want to see the horse; for still another, if I take it, it won't be here for him to use to-night. So watch out, Chick, and, if he attempts to fly the coop, follow him—but don't arrest him—yet."

CHAPTER X.

DEAD AT THE POST OF DUTY.

"You don't want any arrest made until you order it, I suppose?" said Chick.

"Certainly not."

"There is always the chance that he might get away from me, you know."

The detective smiled.

"It won't be much harm if he does," he said.

"It won't do much harm? Why not?"

"Because I know exactly where he will go when he leaves here."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me where; it might help me in following him, you know."

"He will take you to a bachelor-apartment house in New York, called 'The Commanche,'" said the detective.

Chick was silent for a moment, and then he said, half apologetically:

"I suppose I ought to have tumbled to it myself, but I didn't, so I wish you would explain."

"No; I don't think you would ever have tumbled to it, unless you had been with me this morning when I visited the lawyer's office—and you were not there," said Nick. "'The Commanche' is where Mr. Philip Coyne makes his home when he is in New York."

"Great jeewhillikins, Nick! You don't mean to say that this doctor and Philip Coyne are one and the same, do you?"

"Yes, I do, Chick."

"Then what becomes of the old idea about Morgan?"

"It stands just as it did in the first place."

"But, if——"

"Hold on, Chick, and I will explain, in as few words as possible. This case is almost over with almost as soon as it is begun. It is the most complex and complicated thing I ever saw in some respects, but, like all such affairs, it is the simplest of solution, once you are possessed of the key to it."

"I don't understand at all."

"The key to this affair lies in the name of Philip Coyne."

"How so?"

"It was evident to me from the first that all this business could not have been accomplished by one man, unassisted by others. An accomplice, or more than one, was absolutely necessary to its success from the first."

"Well, go on. I am as much at sea as ever."

"I looked for such an accomplice in the other member of the law firm—Clark; but I at once discovered that I was mistaken on that point. Then I decided to look for him in the physician employed by the self-styled Tom Morgan."

"This Dr. Harris, eh?"

"Chick, this man is no more a doctor than you are, or than I am. Dr. Harris is lying dead, alongside the negro, down at the undertaker's shop, in Spotstown."

"The devil!"

"There is a good deal of devil's work in it, isn't there?"

"I should say there was!"

"The man I have been talking to myself in the guise of the man who has posed in this town for a year past as

Thomas Morgan. The man who attended him, as his physician, is now dead, with his face mutilated enough so that the slight resemblance he bore to Morgan passes for the real thing, especially in the light of the evidence of this impostor doctor. That corpse is wearing Morgan's clothes, and other means of identification to make him pass muster as the dead Morgan. The negro was another accomplice, and he was also killed ruthlessly. I have no doubt that both were poisoned before the bullets were fired into them."

"Then, during that week of the disappearance——"

"During that week Morgan was in hiding here, while the doctor continued with his practice. Probably the doctor was to receive two or three hundred thousand dollars for his share in the matter."

"It was a masterly plot, Nick."

"Yes; in some respects it was, but it has failed, simply because he plotted too deeply. As I said a moment ago, one had only to find the key to read the whole riddle."

"But I don't read it all yet."

"We will get it all before we are through with it. Just at present it is this way: When the time came for the disappearance of Morgan, he came to this house, with the negro, by prearrangement. So far as the then doctor was concerned, his only idea was that Morgan was to disappear, and be supposed to be dead. On the other hand, Morgan intended all the time not only to appear to be quite dead, but to put his accomplices out of the way of harming him at the same time."

"I see."

"His plan was to get rid of Morgan, of Dr. Harris and of the negro, all at the same time; but the negro and the doctor were not told that."

"I understand."

"Well, he disappeared. He came here, and was kept in hiding for a week by the man who is now dead—the real Dr. Harris. When the propitious moment came, Morgan killed them both, and, in metaphor, he killed Morgan, at the same time, for, as soon as he elected to disappear as Dr. Harris, which character he only intended to play for a day or two, it was his game to reappear in New York as Lawyer Coyne—and if he had not made the mistake of writing letters to Nick Carter, he might have carried out the whole thing to the end successfully."

"That's as sure as you are alive!"

"I know it."

"But what about the substitute girl-wife in it?"

"Ah! There you have me! I don't know."

"But you are going over to Cresville now to find out, eh?"

"Yes. I am going over to Cresville now to find out. You are to remain here, and watch this house, for sometime before morning, as sure as you live, that chap inside who thinks that I believed him to be Dr. Harris will come out and will start for New York. You will have rather a ticklish job to follow him, too, I'm thinking."

"You needn't worry about that. I'll do it."

"I haven't a doubt of it. You see, Chick, it was a comparatively easy thing to make the real doctor look like Morgan, after his death, and after the mutilation. It was a more difficult thing to make Morgan look enough like the doctor to fool the entire community; but you must remember that he has studied on the thing for a long time. There was enough resemblance between them so that, with a few touches here and there, he could pass muster for a day or so, if he kept very quiet and avoided the regular patients—or all patients, which I suppose he has done. All he required was a day; the rest could take care of itself. The sudden and mysterious disappearance of Dr. Harris, following upon the murders of Morgan and the negro, would only have added another mystery to the history of Spotstown, that is all. So long, now, I'm going. I don't think he will hear me take the horse from the barn, but, if he should, you have only to keep an eye on him, that's all."

The detective glided away in the darkness and was gone.

The doctor's barn stood at some distance from the house, and the lane from it to the highway was also some distance away.

There were two horses in the stable, and, after some thought, Nick saddled one of them, but, when he left the barn, he took them both with him.

He had first examined them, by the aid of his pocket electric light, and had discovered, as he expected he would, that one of them still bore the marks of a harness, and that his belly was spattered with dust that had been half wetted before it was thrown upon him, showing that he had been lately used, and that he had been, as Nick had expressed it, in the edge of a shower.

The other horse was fresh, and had not been used, and it was this one upon which the detective threw the saddle.

He led them both silently along the lane to the roadway, opening and closing the gate with great care.

Then he vaulted into the saddle, and cantered away, still leading the second horse.

It was almost midnight when he arrived at the village of Cresville, which was much like Spotstown, although not as large.

Like it, however, it was possessed of only one street, and the detective rode slowly through this until he came to that part of it where the stores—three in number—and the hotel were located.

There was not a light in a window in the entire town until he came to the stores, and then he found only one.

This light was from two windows, side by side, over one of the stores, and Nick regarded it earnestly before he dismounted.

"That should be the telephone exchange," he mused, "since it is the only window in the village where there is a light."

He dismounted, tied the horses to posts, and then slowly and silently ascended the narrow stairs which led to the room where there was a light.

Arrived at the top, he perceived the glimmer of light under the door, and slowly turned the knob to enter; but the door resisted his efforts. It was locked.

A locked door offered but small impediment to the detective, and in a jiffy he had it open with his little pick-lock.

As he had surmised, the room was the one devoted to the uses of a telephone exchange.

The switchboards—four of them—were in full view from the door.

So also was the figure of a girl, seated on a high-stool chair before them.

When Nick discovered her, she appeared to be sleeping, for her arms were folded under her head, which rested upon them, and her body was in such a position that it was supported in its position between the platform upon which the switchboards rested and the chair in which she was seated.

But under the chair, on the floor, and around it for some distance, there had formed a great pool of blood, where it had dripped from the wounded body.

The girl had been stabbed to death as she sat there in her chair.

She had been struck between the shoulders, and had died almost instantly, it appeared, and doubtless the murderer, after committing the deed, had arranged her in the position in which the detective now found her.

He stood there for a long time regarding the silent form.

"Poor girl," he mused. "I wonder why he found it necessary to kill you?" And then he added: "But, of course, there can be but one answer to that question. He was burning all the bridges behind him, and in some way—because of something you knew, you happened to have the misfortune to be one of the bridges—so you died.

"And you were killed, just at the very moment I called you up over the phone, to have you connect me with the man who at that instant stabbed you.

"It is strange, too," he mused on, "that you could sit here all this time, dead, and not a soul in all the town to find you; and you have been sitting there almost four hours, and not one of the several people who have called you, without getting a reply, have thought to come here to find out what was the matter.

"I think, poor child, that I will leave you where you are, to await the coming of somebody in the morning, for, if I gave the alarm now, I would be detained too long. But I know who killed you, and you shall be avenged. You are as comfortable as you can be made to be in this world, and, whatever is the cause of your taking off, you died at the post of duty."

He turned and left the room, tiptoeing silently from it, closing and again locking the door behind him.

A moment later he was again in the saddle, having left the other horse free to browse along the roadside till morning, while he took his way back again toward Spotstown.

He did not stop when he passed the house where Dr. Harris had lived, although the horse tried to turn in at the stable entrance, but he continued on into the village, and only pulled up when he arrived in front of the undertaking establishment where the bodies of the supposed Morgan and the negro had been taken.

The undertaker lived above his own shop, and Nick speedily routed him from his bed.

CHAPTER XI.

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

The undertaker, rather alarmed by the summons, came down at once when he heard Nick calling.

"I am Nick Carter, from New York," said the detective. "I want to know if you have cared for those two bodies in your charge yet?"

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Has any doubt arisen in your mind as to the identity of the body of Morgan?"

"Well, no, sir—not exactly; only——"

"Well?"

"Only, to tell you the truth, if it were not for the mutilation of the face, I should as soon think it was the body of Dr. Harris. But, of course, Dr. Harris is alive and well, so it could not be he."

"How long has Dr. Harris been a resident of this place?"

"Two years; that is, about that."

"Is there another doctor here?"

"Oh, yes—old Dr. Carpenter."

"Where does he live?"

"Across the street."

"All right. Go and get him and bring him here, while I take a look at these bodies."

When Dr. Carpenter arrived, a few moments later, Nick turned to him at once, and said:

"Doctor, we have got a remarkable case here."

"Yes, sir, so I have been told."

"Have you viewed the bodies yet?"

"No. I intended to do so the first thing in the morning. I am coroner here, but long ago I appointed Dr. Harris as my assistant. I'm getting old, you know. Besides, I was away to-day, and only returned late this evening."

The detective turned to the bodies again, and quickly drew the sheet over the face of the corpse of the white man.

"You knew Dr. Harris quite well, did you?" he asked, then.

"Yes, quite well."

"Do you recall any mark about him by which you could identify him if he were found dead and his face were mutilated beyond recognition?"

"Yes, sir," replied the old doctor, instantly.

"What is that one, sir?"

"His teeth."

"What about them?"

"I have acted as dentist in this village for many years. I have attended to Dr. Harris' teeth several times."

"Do you suppose that you would be able to identify his body, without doubt, by an examination of his teeth?"

"Absolutely so, sir."

"There is no shadow of doubt on the point, in your mind?"

"Not the semblance of a shadow, sir."

The detective pulled the sheet away from the corpse, and stepped back.

"Examine the teeth of this dead man," he said, "and tell me what you think of them."

It was no easy matter to pry open that dead jaw, but it was done more easily than if the undertaker had closed it immediately after death.

There were several moments of utter silence in the room, and then the old physician turned to Nick Carter, and very calmly he said:

"This is the corpse of Dr. Mark Harris, sir. There is not the slightest doubt of it."

"Good!" said Nick. "Now, doctor, you are very tired, I know, but, all the same, I want you to call in the constable and two or three representative citizens of this place, and so make your identification complete. Otherwise, you need make no noise about this affair just at present. In fact, I want it kept entirely quiet until I give the word to speak.

"When you have done that, I want you and the undertaker, together with the representative citizens I have mentioned, to go to New York with me. We will get away on the seven-o'clock train, and we will arrest the murderer of these men. Mr. Undertaker, you may instruct the constable to swear out a warrant for these murders against one Philip Coyne, and tell him that I will pilot him to the murderer, and that he shall have the credit for the arrest.

"Now, gentlemen, I will ask you to meet me, with your witnesses, at the station at seven o'clock."

He turned away, and was gone, and a moment later they heard him galloping through the street.

He did not pause until he arrived in front of the house where Dr. Harris had lived, for he had made up his mind that, if the pseudo doctor had not yet decamped, he would arrest him at once.

But he soon discovered that his man had gone.

The house was empty, and Chick had also disappeared.

He forced open the front door, and entered, and, as he did so, he noticed a spark of fire which momentarily brightened up and then dimmed again, and he recognized the smell of burning powder.

The spark of fire was inside the room which the doctor had used as an office, and the detective leaped forward and placed one foot upon the glowing point just in time to prevent the explosion which would have followed a moment later.

The escaping criminal had laid his plans well. He had scattered a half barrel of powder, and had then manufac-

tured a fuse, which he had led across the floor to a considerable distance; but he had made his fuse too long, or it had not burned as rapidly as he thought it would.

In one more minute the house would have fallen into a heap of ruins, only to have been speedily consumed by fire afterward; as it was, the evidence was there to tell what had been attempted.

Robert Clark was quite surprised to find the detective awaiting him at his office when he arrived there the following morning at eight-thirty, a little before his usual time.

"I am glad you are here!" he exclaimed; "for I was just this moment wondering if I could reach you by telegraph. My partner has returned very unexpectedly."

"Indeed!" replied Nick. "Do you expect him at the office this morning?"

"Yes. He sent me word that he wished me to meet him here at nine, as he intends to go away again immediately."

Nick jerked his head toward the door which communicated with the room that had been set aside as the private office of Philip Coyne.

"I am going in there to wait for Mr. Coyne," he said. "I already knew that he would be here this morning."

"You did?"

"Wait. When he comes, do me the favor to say nothing of the fact that I am here, or that anybody is waiting in that room for him. Your clerks are already posted about it."

"But——"

"And then, Mr. Clark, please conduct him directly to me, will you?"

"Why all this mystery, Mr. Carter?"

"You will know in good time, and it is in a good cause. Will you do as I request?"

"Yes; but——"

"Thank you."

Nick turned away and disappeared inside the private office just an instant before Mr. Philip Coyne appeared through the outer door.

Nick Carter was not the only one who waited in that inner office. There was Dr. Carpenter, the undertaker, the constable, the justice of the peace and several of the citizens of Spotstown there also; and they had not long to wait.

There was a murmur of voices in the outer room, and then the door was thrown open, and Philip Coyne entered the room.

He was so changed in appearance that there might have been some difficulty in recognizing him had he not instantly betrayed himself when he saw the group that awaited him, for the beard had disappeared, the dye had been washed from his hair, leaving it almost white—its natural color, as it appeared—and there were other alterations, slight in themselves, but sufficient to alter his appearance wonderfully.

But he betrayed himself.

The instant he stepped through the door he saw Nick Carter, and halted.

Then, like a flash, he drew a revolver, raised it and aimed it at the detective, exclaiming as he did so:

"Damn you, Nick Carter!"

But the revolver was not discharged.

Nick did not move from his position, but Chick, who had followed the man into the room, leaped forward and seized the weapon before Coyne could discharge it.

In another moment he was overpowered, and the game was up for him.

* * * * * * *

Well, that ends the story.

The whole case was made as clear as could be by the confession of Philip Coyne, which was the criminal's true name. But he could never be made to confess why he had killed the telephone girl, although freely admitting that he did kill her; but it was not difficult to guess that in some way she had known something of the plots, and was, therefore, put out of the way forever, as others had been.

The property stolen from the Cathedral of San Juan de Ulca was entirely recovered, save about a hundred thousand dollars, which the villain had expended.

And, when Nick Carter went to his home after the arrest, he found a cable message awaiting him there, which explains itself. It read:

"Thanks. Man at Agamemnon old offender long wanted. Passed as Coyne. Says Coyne is in Spotstown, near New York; lives under name Morgan."

It was signed by the inspector to whom Nick had cabled, and was the last link in the chain of evidence against Coyne.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. [illegible] will contain "A Fortune of a Million; or, Nick Carter's Beautiful Adversary."

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